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JCS, Wash., D.C.
JSPD

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23 March 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROBERT JOYCE, DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Subject: Plan for Action in Event of Stalin's Death.

Reference: SECRET Memorandum from Edwin M.J. Kretzmann
to Mr. Joseph B. Phillips, dated 6 February
1951, Department of State

1. The reference, which includes a memorandum by John Scott, is an unusually thought-provoking document. Since it includes action well beyond propaganda and involves covert techniques, I recommend that its classification be raised now to TOP SECRET and its circulation be restricted as far as possible to those who are authorized to have knowledge of covert activities and techniques.

2. I agree with your comment to the effect that we are not yet equipped to operate in this field, but that its implications are so important that we must do so. The first and fundamental lack is an intelligence one. The memorandum recognizes that such a plan must, in the first instance, be based on information. I am inclined to believe that the Politburo is so aware of its own insecurities and dangers that the clear necessity for unity will not permit the sort of dissension for which we hope, and that therefore the hypothetical situation that is envisaged does not really exist. On the other hand, there is not only too little information to permit a firm view one way or the other, but suspicion and fear seems to be with good reason so deeply ingrained in the Soviet character that the possibility of our magnifying a tendency or even creating such a situation really exists. When it comes to supporting one or other of the possible competitors for power we are completely dependent on information which is, as far as I know completely non-existent, for we could easily end up by supporting the most dangerous competitor. Although the powerful effect of overt U.S. support is obvious, it could easily have more hooks in it than advantages, particularly in the support of the Russian people themselves. All the more reason why we should make every effort to keep it from being another China, where we don't know whom to back and where the support of the people goes to the Communists, who alone can organize things.

3. It seems to me that the way to go about this is to buy not more than two phases of the proposal at this time, and to buy the first one firmly and without delay. Those phases are (1) the gathering and centralizing of information and (2) the dissemination of propaganda to the general effect that Stalin's lieutenants are already beginning to struggle for the mantle of power, carefully appraising and controlling every case wherein we get specific as to just who is doing what.

4. Just putting out a call for the necessary intelligence won't give us results. Another Kelly seems needed to do the same caliber of job that he did on the emigre organizations, preferably more than one Kelly, as this is a field where a personal error of judgment could be disastrous. I do not think we will get anywhere unless State or the Central Intelligence Agency can dig up one or more really qualified people, on contract or otherwise, to really take this job in hand. Maybe John Scott can make some more definite proposals on this aspect.

5. The quite general propaganda that can be put out now doesn't look too difficult or too tricky. It is when one gets specific that one needs more than we've got.

6. Any release for further action along the general lines of the referenced memorandum should, in my tentative opinion, be based on the results of our special efforts to obtain better information.

7. Meanwhile, there is a collateral thing which can be done, but which falls far short of the proposal of the reference. That is the preparation of a plan for purely propaganda action based on present information in the event of Stalin's death. The RAND Corporation, which is particularly well qualified, was approached to prepare a study which might have gone far towards putting such a plan on its feet. RAND replied that they did not feel they could make the study with the intelligence presently on hand. It might still be possible to have RAND attempt the study with a clear understanding of the present intelligence limitations, and to include a statement of their requirements for further intelligence. This, and possibly other efforts to the same end, might be supported and accelerated to give us something pending a real extension of the essential information. It would appear that until we know better what we are doing or something pops, we should not go beyond general and rather vague propaganda, or at most play the field as regards Politburo individuals.

8. If, as John Reed believes, we do succeed in getting a reasonably firm intelligence base for the sort of operation he proposes, we can at least hope that by that time OPC will have reached a point where they can actually hope to stage something through their future networks behind the Iron Curtain. Incidentally, Stalin's death might open up some possibilities in the satellites as well as in Russia itself. If he should die before we succeed in overcoming our intelligence lack, I don't see what we can wisely do other than to have a firm propaganda plan and some "what if" plans for OPC action which could only be released for action in the light of events.

9. One other aspect seems worth mentioning here. I believe that there is a real danger of being premature, as well as the more obvious danger of too little and too late. For example, there were stories going round that the death of Zhdanov and some of his friends was the result of his bringing into existence - even perhaps unconsciously - a power machine. We don't have enough information to accept such stories, nor can we entirely reject them. But if that one was true, and if we can really cause reactions, do we want to shoot in the dark and perhaps bring about a consolidation and elimination of weaknesses at a time when it might do good for anyone to keep Stalin or his succeeding image?

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10. The whole thing is something for our Remembrance to brood over uninterruptedly for a while. But first we need some better data for them to brood on.

L.C. STEVENS
Rear Admiral, USN,
Chief,

Copy to:
Brig Gen John Magruder, OSD